

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 28, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Stephanie A. Smith (Vermont State Hazard Mitigation Officer), Russ Barrett (Northfield Conservation Commission), Eric Davis (All Clean Waste Services), Jeremy Drown, Matt Gadbois, Lydia Petty, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Stephanie A. Smith, Vermont State Hazard Mitigation Officer: FEMA Buyout (310 Water Street).** Ms. Smith was in contact earlier with Manager Schulz regarding a potential FEMA buyout property located at 310 Water Street. This parcel is at the northwest corner of Water Street and Wall Street and currently hosts a laundromat and two (2) rental units. Ms. Smith said Hazard Mitigation funds are available for the process and applications for this program must be submitted by next summer. The Select Board members must provide their approval because the municipality would take possession of the property once the process has been completed. Board member Morse asked if there would be any relocation assistance for the tenants now living in the building. Ms. Smith said the state would provide some assistance and the cost would be part of the buyout budget. Board member Stevens asked about the municipality's fiscal responsibility in this process. Ms. Smith said there is a twenty-five percent (25%) local share amount but these funds could come from other sources than the municipality. She really did not expect the municipality would have to contribute any funding for the buyout. Board member Goodrich asked how the buyout amount was determined. Ms. Smith said that once the process was underway, the property would be assessed for its current market value. The current property owner is not obligated to accept the determined amount and can pull out of the buyout process at that time. Chair Maxwell noted that an adjoining property has an easement to use this parcel to access its driveway. Ms. Smith said any easement issues can be worked out during the process. She added that once the state receives the buyout application, the initial review process commences that could take up to six (6) months or even longer (if there are significant issues). Once the FEMA award has been granted, the property and existing structure will be inspected and appraised. This will include an asbestos inspection. The municipality's attorney will be expected to draft the property closing documents at that time. Ms. Smith will work with FEMA throughout the process and will provide any assistance needed to the municipality and the current property owner. Once FEMA issues the buyout check, the closing process will come to its conclusion to be swiftly followed by structure demolition and landscaping of the parcel. When all is complete, the municipality would be taking possession of an empty lot covered with grass. Board member Morse asked what would be the timeline for the tenants to move out. Ms. Smith said they would have to work that out with their landlord. The building must be vacated before the closing process.
- Matt Gadbois owns this property and the laundromat located there. He said he has had struggles with this property for several years as the high cost of flood insurance and local property taxes make it difficult for him to make any profit from his business. Board member Morse asked if Mr. Gadbois planned to relocate his laundromat business elsewhere. Mr. Gadbois has not thought that far ahead but there is a possibility as he will retain the washers, dryers, etc.

Board member Morse thought it would be hard on community members to lose one of their two (2) laundromats but he would support this buyout application. Board member Goodrich asked if the tenants know about Mr. Gadbois' plans. Ms. Gadbois said one does and the other does not. He was saving those conversations for a later time when he learned whether the buyout process was feasible. Manager Schulz said this item is also listed as an action item later in the meeting in case the Select Board members did decide to move forward on this tonight. There also is the possibility of tabling the matter if more information is needed. Ms. Smith noted that the application deadline is next summer so there is no need to act quickly. However, the earlier the application is submitted this year makes it more likely the whole process can be completed next year.

- b. **Russ Barrett, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): Washington County Forester Project Authorization.** Mr. Barrett is the former Washington County Forester and he was asking tonight that the Select Board members authorize him and other NCC members to work with the current Washington County Forester (Robert Nelson) on an update of the local Forest Management Plan. The current plan was drafted by Consulting Forester Rose Beatty and approved by then County Forester Russ Barrett in 2000. This plan is included in the Northfield Town Forest Stewardship Plan that the Select Board members adopted in 2019 and is badly in need of revision. Manager Schulz asked if a formal contract is required for this. Mr. Barrett said Select Board authorization in the form of a motion would be sufficient as there would be no direct cost to the municipality. There were no objections from the Select Board members. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to authorize the Northfield Conservation Commission to work with Washington County Forester Robert Nelson on an update of the local Forest Management Plan. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Jeremy Drown: Hockey Rink Donation.** Mr. Drown said it has been his vision for several years to help establish an outside hockey rink in Northfield. He thinks the best location would be in Memorial Park and he would pay for the rink himself as well as all installation costs. Mr. Drown and other volunteers would take care of future maintenance so there would be no direct cost to the municipality. Mr. Drown has his own machine that would be used to maintain the surface. He had hoped this project might be accomplished this coming winter but he recently contacted the rink material supplier and learned that due to the global pandemic and related issues, there now was a twelve (12) week backlog for delivery. Therefore, this probably won't happen this year but Mr. Drown would like Select Board authorization so he can start the process as soon as possible. He feels having this public rink would be great for local youth and he envisions initial use on weekends only. If this rink proves to be a success, there might be the possibility of adding lighting later to allow for weeknight usage. If organized groups would like to use the rink, perhaps they could be asked to make a donation to the municipality that could be used to offset park maintenance expenses. Mr. Drown said when he first looked into this the cost of the rink was about \$8,000 but now has gone up to about \$14,000. All in all, Mr. Drown believes having this rink in place would be a great benefit to the community and would extend public use of Memorial Park into the winter months. Chair Maxwell then asked if the Select Board members had any questions for Mr. Drown. Board member Morse thanked Mr. Drown for this generous offer and said this would be a major donation to the community. He then asked where the rink would be located in Memorial Park. Mr. Drown thought it would fit well in the "Little League Ballfield" located by the parking lot. The rink would be installed after the Northfield Middle/High School soccer season ends at the beginning of November and removed before the baseball/softball season starts in early April. The rink he has in mind can be installed and removed relatively quickly and will not damage the field beneath it.

Board member Stevens felt this was a great thing to do for the community. He asked if the park's bathrooms would be usable in the wintertime. Mr. Drown said the bathrooms currently are not heated but he felt this problem could be worked around using space heaters, portalets, etc. If rink use does prove to be popular over time, the municipality may decide someday to invest in heating the restrooms for winter usage. Board member Goodrich also believes this is a good idea but has concerns about municipal liability should someone be injured using the rink. Manager Schulz said we could reach out to our insurance provider to see if our current blanket coverage would be sufficient or if a separate insurance rider would be needed. Mr. Drown added that any organized groups using the facility would have their own insurance coverage. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to accept the proposed donation from Jeremy Drown of an outdoors hockey rink to be located in Memorial Park. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Chair Maxwell again thanked Mr. Drown for his generous offer. Once built, this rink would be a valuable asset for the Northfield community for many years to come.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **September 14, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #06-22.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #06-22 in the amount of \$399,492.32. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through September 19, 2021.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$101,201.35. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **FEMA Buyout (310 Water Street).** As this topic had been discussed earlier, Manager Schulz now asked if the Select Board members wanted to take action on this tonight or if they needed additional information. He noted that Select Board approval is necessary since the buyout parcel would become municipal property when the process is over and municipal staff would be providing some buyout process assistance. Board member Goodrich asked if the same restrictions FEMA imposed on future use of previous buyout properties are still in place. Manager Schulz confirmed that no permanent structures would be allowed, no paved parking areas, etc. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize moving forward with the FEMA buyout process for the parcel located at 310 Water Street. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Northfield Transfer Station Agreement.** At the previous meeting (09/14/21), Eric Davis from All Clean Waste Systems, which operates the Northfield Transfer Station for the municipality, noted his contract will expire at the end of this month. He indicated that he is very interested in renewing the contract and he also suggested then some possible upgrades to the facility. The Select Board members at that time indicated their interest in renewing the contract given the good job Mr. Davis and his employees have done in running the facility and interacting with the public. Manager Schulz subsequently made minor revisions in the current contract such as changing the contract's starting and ending dates, extending the contract length from three (3) to five (5) years (as Mr. Davis requested), etc. He emailed the revised contract to Mr. Davis late last week. He received a response today in which Mr. Davis himself suggested an additional number of minor changes. Manager Schulz forwarded Mr. Davis' email to the Select Board members this afternoon. He would like to know if the Select Board members would like to proceed on awarding the contract tonight or if they would like to table this matter to the next meeting (10/12/21).

After some discussion over whether the Select Board should authorize Manager Schulz to negotiate the contract with Mr. Davis, it was decided it would be best to table the matter as some Select Board members had not yet seen Mr. Davis' email and others had questions about some of his revisions including the new composting fee. Mr. Davis will continue his operations of the Transfer Station in the interim.

- c. **Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) Appointment.** The TFSC is a subcommittee of the Northfield Conservation Commission and has had a vacancy for several months. Mat Katz, a Bear Farm Road resident, has attended recent NCC and TFSC meetings and expressed interest in filling the vacancy. Both the NCC and TFSC recommended his appointment at their most recent meetings. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Mat Katz to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Zoning Regulations – Retaining Walls.** Chair Maxwell said this item is on the agenda because Board member Morse has some concerns about the requirements in the current local zoning regulations regarding retaining walls built on private property. Board member Morse confirmed that in his journeys delivering "Meals and Wheels" he has seen a number of retaining walls located on private properties that he did not believe had been issued permits by the Zoning Administrator and/or Development Review Board (DRB). Board member Morse said the current zoning regulations require that retaining walls over four feet (4') tall must have "certified plans by a licensed professional engineer" submitted with their permit application. Board member Morse felt such a requirement for work on one's own property imposed an unnecessary expense on the homeowner. He would like to suspend this requirement provided the retaining wall is located well within the landowner's property and doesn't infringe on a highway right-of-way, railroad right-of-way, public waterways, etc. It was noted retaining walls over eight feet (8') tall also require approval of the DRB (not just the Zoning Administrator). Board member Morse would like to see a moratorium on requiring engineering plans for retaining walls. Manager Schulz doesn't believe the Select Board members have the authority to impose such a moratorium since the zoning regulations are the result of numerous public meetings and public votes taken by both the Planning Commission (PC) and Select Board. Such an action would require an amendment of the zoning regulations, which would require additional public meetings and votes. Board member Goodrich asked if the PC members were currently into the process of revising the local zoning regulations to better conform with the most recent version of the local Town Plan approved in August 2020. Manager Schulz confirmed they were but this will be a lengthy process that will take at least a year to complete. Should Board member Morse want this change regarding retaining walls accomplished sooner, it probably would be best for him to directly address the PC and request a zoning bylaw amendment. Board member Morse said he would start working on this since he felt the current retaining walls stipulations are particularly onerous. Chair Maxwell then thanked Board member Morse for bringing this matter to the other Select Board members' attention.
- e. **Turkey Hill Farm Lease Agreement.** As this matter involves contract negotiation, Manager Schulz felt it was best discussed in executive session (as state statute permits). There was no objection.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Cox Brook Road Repairs.** Manager Schulz said a paving contractor came to town recently to repair the pavement cracks on Cox Brook Road. The cost for this work will be about \$4,200.
- b. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Since Board member Stevens and other residents have noted edging problems on the road's new pavement, Manager Schulz asked the project contractor to review the problem areas with him and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker. A plan is being developed on how to best fix the problem with additional roadside stone, etc. There will be a future discussion regarding how this additional cost will be allocated.

- c. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** As Manager Schulz informed the Select Board members at the last meeting, engineers hired by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) have been in town over the past week taking core samples, etc. on the Main Street Bridge. This is one of the initial stages of the engineering process for the full bridge replacement now scheduled for the summer of 2025. A total of twelve (12) drillings were made and a test well was installed. Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi also was on hand for an initial discussion with the engineers regarding possible relocation of the municipal power lines, waterlines, and sewerlines in the area. There was a lot of activity on and near the bridge this past week and this is a good sign the project is proceeding.
- d. **Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF).** Manager Schulz said state inspectors reviewed the facility recently and found it in very good condition and found no violations. These inspections are done every three (3) years. The next one will probably result in recommendations for facility upgrades in order to meet new state and federal requirements regarding stormwater, etc.
- e. **Municipal Building Computer Server.** The computer servers in the Municipal Building need to be replaced every five (5) years. The cost is about \$40,000 and this expense has been budgeted in the building's Capital Equipment Plan. The company that oversees our computer operations is recommending that the municipality switch from a hardware-based to a cloud-based information storage system. This would eliminate the cost of purchasing new hardware but these savings would be somewhat offset by monthly maintenance charges.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Next Utility Commissions Joint Meeting.** Board member Morse noted the utility commissions haven't met for a few months and asked when the next joint meeting would be held. Manager Schulz said it would be held next Monday night (10/04/21) in the Municipal Building at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will be warned before this weekend and there will be remote meeting information on the agenda in case interested parties don't want to attend in person.
- b. **Common Enhancement Grant Artwork.** Board member Morse wanted to know the status of the statue that was to be installed on the Common as part of this project. Manager Schulz said the local group Northfield Common Connections, led by Lydia Petty and Bonnie Donahue, were awarded an \$18,000 Better Places Grant with the funds to be used to enhance the Common. This includes the installation of new chairs and tables; large banners; improved lighting; art projects; etc. There was a discussion of perhaps purchasing a sculpture from a local artist but an agreement was not reached with this person regarding the purchase. There has been subsequent outreach to other local artists. The budget for this art installation is about \$3,000. Board member Morse asked how this outreach was taking place. Manager Schulz said Northfield Common Connections has been directly contacting local artists. Due to low cost of the proposed purchase, paid advertising really isn't feasible. Board member Morse asked if there were minutes from this group's meetings. Manager Schulz said he could provide them. This is not a municipal board so public posting of their minutes is not required by state law.
- c. **Stony Brook Road Bridge Repairs Project.** Board member Stevens asked if this project's RFP has been distributed yet. Manager Schulz said the RFP has been prepared but he has held off on sending it out as he understands recent bids for similar projects have been unexpectedly high. He felt it best to wait for a better business climate when the situation has normalized.

- d. **Economic Development Director (EDD) Position.** Board member Stevens asked if Manager Schulz has reached out to the former EDD (Jon Ignatowski) to see if he would like to work remotely on an interim basis. Manager Schulz said he has had some discussions with him regarding that possibility. As this is a personnel matter, any additional information about this probably should be discussed in executive session. Chair Maxwell noted the Economic Development Subcommittee will look further into this matter when it meets this Thursday evening (09/30/21).
- e. **Town Budget Process.** Board member Goodrich asked if the Department Heads are preparing their budgets now. Manager Schulz said Finance Director Laurie Baroffio is putting together the information for them and it will be distributed soon.
- f. **Highway Subcommittee Meeting.** Chair Maxwell noted the subcommittee met this morning with Manager Schulz and Highway Foreman Tucker. Among other matters discussed, he asked Mr. Tucker to prepare well for budget season if he wants any high-ticket items next year.
- g. **Norwich University (NU) Presidential Inauguration.** Chair Maxwell said he attended NU President Mark Anarumo's inauguration and other festivities last week. He wanted to take this opportunity to again welcome President Anarumo and his family to the Northfield community.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Matt Gadbois: Northfield Labor Day Weekend Observances.** Mr. Gadbois is Vice-President of the volunteer group that organizes and oversees the celebrations that take place here over the Labor Day Weekend. He first wanted to thank the members of the Northfield Highway and Water/Sewer crews who helped prepare for the festivities by helping install the performance stage, additional lighting, etc., on the Common. Mr. Gadbois noted the Labor Day Parade has been held since 1974 and has been only cancelled twice due to the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene and the COVID-19 pandemic. He particularly wanted to thank Wendy Rea, who serves as the organization's President, for all her excellent work in making sure the celebration not only takes place but is a success enjoyed not just by Northfield residents but also by many visitors to our community. Mr. Gadbois noted that Ms. Rea's dedication to this community is a year-round commitment as she also helps out with the local food shelf every weekend. Mr. Gadbois said such volunteers makes this a very caring community even though the pool of available volunteers seems to be getting smaller each year. The Labor Day Weekend group will hold their next meeting in the Community Room on Wednesday, November 10, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract negotiation with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:34 p.m.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:50 p.m. No action was taken.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.